Twentieth Century Canadian Literature (ENG-685 M01)

Monday 5.30-7.45, -Thursday 4.30-7.30, **Thursday March 8 the class will be from 5.30 to 8.45 (Spring 2011)

Instructor: Dr Pilar Somacarrera, Department of English, UAM
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Description and objectives:
This course is a survey of contemporary Canadian literature. It will pay special attention to Canada’s double role as a former British colony and as an agent of power over the aboriginal peoples and the French minority, and will emphasize the multicultural nature of Canadian Literature, dealing with contemporary writers from different backgrounds. In addition, the representation and articulation of various ethnic, gender and regional identities within a range of twentieth-century Canadian fiction, poetry and drama will explored. Selected theoretical conceptions of history, identity and language will be introduced and some familiarity with feminist, postmodern and postcolonial critical perspectives will be attained.

Assessment
Oral individual presentation: 20%
Class preparation, shorter oral contributions and participation in class discussion: 15%
Final paper: 65%

Course schedule
January
Thursday January 13: Course presentation. Video
Monday January 17: George Elliott Clarke “What Was Canada?” (article), poems by Irving Layton
Thursday January 20: The Journals of Susana Moodie: poems & Afterword; “Circling the Downspout of Empire” by L. Hutcheon (article)
Thursday January 27: Cyril Dabydeen’s “Multiculturalism” and Michael Ondaatje’s “Wells.” Last day to choose a topic for oral presentation.
Monday January 31: Class at the UAM.

February
Thursday February 3: Leonard Cohen’s “Suzanne” and Dionne Brand’s “Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater”
Monday February 7: Margaret Atwood’s Alias Grace and the historical novel (read Margaret Atwood’s poem “True Stories”)
Thursday February 10 Margaret Atwood’s Alias Grace
Monday February 14: Margaret Atwood’s Alias Grace
Thursday February 17 Native literature: “History Lesson” by Jeannette Amstrong & “A Coyote Columbus Story “ by Thomas King
Monday February 21: No class
Thursday February 24: Tomson Highway’s *The Rez Sisters*
Monday February 28: Tomson Highway’s *The Rez Sisters*

March
Thursday March 3: Diasporic writers. Rohinton Mistry’s Tales from *Firozsha Baag*
Monday March 7: Rohinton Mistry’s Tales from *Firozsha Baag*
Thursday March 10: Ann-Marie MacDonald’s *Fall on Your Knees*
Monday March 14: Ann-Marie MacDonald’s *Fall on Your Knees*. Conclusions to the course.

TOPICS FOR ORAL PRESENTATIONS

Margaret Atwood’s *Alias Grace*:
   a) Writing history: what view of history is presented in this novel? Read Atwood’s article “In Search of *Alias Grace*”
   b) Women’s madness: is Grace mad? How does the novel rewrite the Victorian plot of the madwoman?
   c) Doubles, Split Selves: Grace / Mary Whitney. Are there other doubles/split selves in this novel?
   d) Quilting metaphors: How may the idea of patchwork be used in relation to Grace’s story? to the construction of the novel? Grace’s own quilt at the end. (Read Margaret Rogerson’s article)

Tomson Highway’s *The Rez Sisters*
   a) Tomson Highway’s view of the” Rez”: the”Rez” vs. the Reserve? Does he present an optimistic or pessimistic view of it? Which stereotypes is he trying to subvert?
   b) Portraits of women: how are women depicted in the play? In which way or ways are they transgressors? Is Highway’s portrait of women politically correct or not?
   c) Country music: How does it function as an intertext in Highway’s play?
   d) A “queer” reading of *The Rez Sisters*: does the play encode minority sexual orientations and gender identities?

Rohinton Mistry’s *Tales from Firozsha Baag*
   a) Immigration and multiculturalism: how are these two aspects portrayed in the stories
   b) Orientalism: how is it reflected in the stories?
   c) Humour: how does humour work in Rohinton Mistry’s stories?

Ann-Marie MacDonald’s *Fall on Your Knees*:
   a) Intertextuality: which literary texts are mentioned in the novel and what is their significance?
   b) The novel as a feminist critique of patriarchal authority and traditional heterosexual romance plots
   c) Immigration and multiculturalism: how are they reflected in the novel?
   d) Historical novel: which aspects of Canadian history are presented in the novel and how are these historical facts approached?
Brief instructions for oral presentations and final paper.

- **A presentation will be assigned a 15-20 minutes time slot.** The following aspects will be taken account in the assessment: clarity and respect to time constraints; capacity to interact, (you may ask questions to the audience), ability to communicate and make your talk interesting *(please do not read out!)*; good use of audiovisual or written material (handouts, outlines, slides, power point…); adequate use of evidence from the analyzed text and good application of theoretical notions.

- Please notify the teacher at least on the class before the presentation if you need audiovisual equipment or photocopies at least one day before the presentation. If you are doing a power point presentation, you have to email it to the teacher the day before the presentation is due.

- **A no-show on the day of the presentation will mean the loss of credit**. Alternative dates will not be arranged. Should you have to be absent on the day of the presentation because of grave reasons (illness), please notify the teacher as soon as possible.

- **Your final paper must an original piece of academic work about one or several of the texts which have been discussed in class.** It must use evidence (quotations) from the relevant primary texts and a minimal theoretical background. Please follow one reference system of your choice consistently (MLA, Chicago etc.) The paper’s extension will be between 10 and 15 pages (A4, double-spaced, 25-27 lines per page, Times Roman 12).

**Basic bibliography**


